

that the artistic temperament not only has,  
but must, be  
*mladif*. Today, when so much literature that  
is not  
popular seems simply insane, the question  
grows still  
more urgent. This book was not written to  
prove a  
thesis. I do not propose to begin now. It is a  
problem  
which everyone who cares for literature  
must face for  
himself. Though I suspect that the answer  
will be found  
not by the lucubrations of critics, but by the  
return of  
society at large to some simpler and saner  
way of life.  
Meanwhile (for we are likely to wait long for  
that) it  
would perhaps be something if at least  
authors and critics  
could recover some sense of proportion and  
cease to treat  
literature as a sort of sacrament; to talk  
mystically about  
the 'devoirs' of Art; to behave as if a well-  
constructed  
novel were a consolation for the worst-  
constructed life,  
and no human happiness could compare with  
a happy  
epithet. It is the critics rather than the artists  
themselves  
who started treating literature with this  
pompous solemn-  
nity, which has been bad alike for it and diem;  
it was they  
who long ago began conducting  
controversies of literary  
taste as if they were holy wars on which hung  
the fate of  
Christendom. Only in the nineteenth century  
did creative  
writers become badly infected with idolatry  
of Art and  
manias for martyrdom. To the simplicity of  
Hesiod, as  
to the good sense of Johnson, it would have  
seemed absurd;

but somehow it imposed itself on the passion  
of Flaubert  
and the subtlety of Proust. Great though  
they remained  
in spite of this, it is likely enough that with  
more sense of  
reality and healthier nerves they might have  
been greater  
still. It is time we shook off the mystical  
superstitions  
about literature that lead to the hermitage  
and the conventicle, to clique and coterie. 'N'esthetisons  
pas, ne  
byzantinons plus.'